

Bill Would Also Revive Struggling Construction Industry, Fight Global Warming, and Improve Education

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(Washington, D.C.) - U.S. Congressman Albio Sires (D-NJ) today voted for legislation that would help renovate and modernize public schools in New Jersey and around the country.

By a vote of 250 to 164, the House passed the 21st Century Green High-Performing Public School Facilities Act (H.R. 3021), which provides funding to states and school districts to help ensure that school facilities and learning environments are safe, healthy, energy-efficient, environmentally friendly, and technologically advanced. The legislation includes \$132 million in funding for physical improvement projects for New Jersey's schools.

“According to recent estimates, America's public schools are hundreds of billions of dollars short of the funding needed to bring them into good condition,” said Congressman Sires.

While Congress provided \$1.2 billion in funding for emergency school repairs in 2001, and provided additional resources for schools devastated by Hurricane Katrina and Rita, the Bush administration has not provided direct funding for general school construction in any of its budgets over the last eight years. As a result, schools have been forced to rely mostly on state and local funding for any repair or renovation projects.

Overall, H.R. 3021 would authorize \$6.4 billion for school renovation and modernization projects for fiscal year 2009, and would ensure that school districts quickly receive funds for projects that improve schools' teaching and learning climates, health and safety, and energy efficiency. To further encourage energy efficiency and the use of renewable resources in schools, the bill would require that the majority of funds for school improvement projects meet widely recognized green building standards and would provide states with funds to help schools track their facilities' needs, energy use, and carbon footprints, among other things.

“I supported this bill because I believe it will help improve education, the economy and the environment which is a clear win for children, workers and the planet,” Congressman Sires added.

In addition, the legislation would bring immediate benefits to workers in the nation's construction industry - one of the sectors hit hardest by the recent economic downturn - and would ensure fair wages and benefits for workers by applying Davis-Bacon protections to all grants awarded for school improvement projects.

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